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1984 Hg
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Sl. Rev 10/66 Sl. Rev. 8/67

STORING Perishable FOODS

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Home and Garden Bulletin No. 78
U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

CONTENTS

	Page
Storage needs vary	3
Temperatures in the refrigerator	4
Storage directions:	
Breads and cereals	5
Eggs	5
Fats and oils	6
Fruits	7
Meat, poultry, fish	8
Milk, cream, cheese	9
Vegetables	10
Miscellaneous foods	12

Additional information on storing and preserving foods available from U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington 25, D.C.

Family Food Stockpile for Survival. G-77.

Home Care of Purchased Frozen Foods. G-69.

Home Canning of Fruits and Vegetables. G-8.

How To Make Jellies, Jams, and Preserves at Home. G-56.

Home Freezing of Fruits and Vegetables. G-10.

*Prepared by
Institute of Home Economics
Agricultural Research Service*

Washington, D.C.

Issued October 1961

For sale by the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government
Printing Office—Washington 25, D.C. - Price 10 cents

STORING Perishable FOODS

in the Home



Fresh perishable foods should be used soon after harvest or purchase, or stored at the right temperature and humidity. Otherwise, they start to lose quality quickly.

When foods are held too long or under poor storage conditions, they spoil. Some kinds of spoilage make foods harmful to health; some do not; and it is not always possible to distinguish between the two kinds.

Indications of spoilage that make food unpalatable but not hazardous to health are the rancid odor and flavor of fats caused by oxidation, slime on the surface of meat, the fermentation of fruit juices due to yeast growth, and mold on bread.

Among the signals that indicate dangerous bacterial spoilage are off-odors in foods and a sour taste in bland foods.

Low temperatures are required in the storage of many perishable foods. Low temperature retards quality losses in these foods and delays spoilage by slowing the action of enzymes naturally present in foods and the growth of spoilage organisms that are always present in air, water, and soil.

STORAGE NEEDS VARY

Foods vary in the degree of temperature and the amount of moisture needed to retain quality in storage.

Although most fresh perishable foods keep longest and best in the refrigerator, certain varieties of apples and some root vegetables keep well in a cool basement or outdoor cellar or pit. A few fruits and vegetables can be held successfully at room temperatures.

Green leafy vegetables keep their crispness and nutrients best in cold, moist air. On the other hand, too much moisture in the air around cherries and berries encourages the growth of mold and rot.

Any refrigerated food that loses quality through drying should be kept covered. Most refrigerators come equipped with covered containers—food fresheners or crispers—for fruits and vegetables. The plastic bags in which fresh produce is sometimes packaged retard moisture losses of the foods stored in them.

TEMPERATURES IN THE REFRIGERATOR

In most refrigerators, with the control set at the position for normal operation, the average temperature in the general storage area is usually between 38° and 42° F. The chill tray, located just below the freezing unit, is the coldest area outside of the freezing unit; the area at the bottom of the cabinet is the warmest.

As air in the refrigerator circulates, the cooler air falls and forces the warmer air near the bottom to rise. This movement of air tends to dry out any uncovered or unwrapped food.

Temperatures in refrigerator-freezer combinations are about the same throughout the refrigerator section.

The homemaker can check the temperatures in her refrigerator by placing a thermometer in different locations in the cabinet. If temperatures within the cabinet are above 42° F. the control should be regulated to maintain a lower temperature.

An accumulation of thick frost on the freezing unit or frequent openings of the refrigerator door, especially on warm, humid days, raise the refrigerator temperatures.

Since the freezing compartments of home refrigerators are not designed to give temperatures of 0° F., hold frozen foods only a few



days in these. However, in the refrigerator-freezer combinations where temperatures can be maintained at 0° F. or lower in the freezer cabinet, food may be kept for the same storage periods as in a freezer.

STORAGE DIRECTIONS

Breads and Cereals

Breads

Store in original wrapper in breadbox or refrigerator. Bread keeps its freshness longer at room temperature than in the refrigerator. In hot, humid weather, however, bread is better protected against mold in the refrigerator than in the breadbox.

Breads will retain their original freshness for a week or two if frozen in their original wrappers and stored in the home freezer soon after baking and cooling.

Cereals, flours, spices, and sugar

Store at room temperatures in tightly closed containers that keep out dust, moisture, and insects.

During summer, buy flours and cereals in small quantities. Inspect often for weevils.

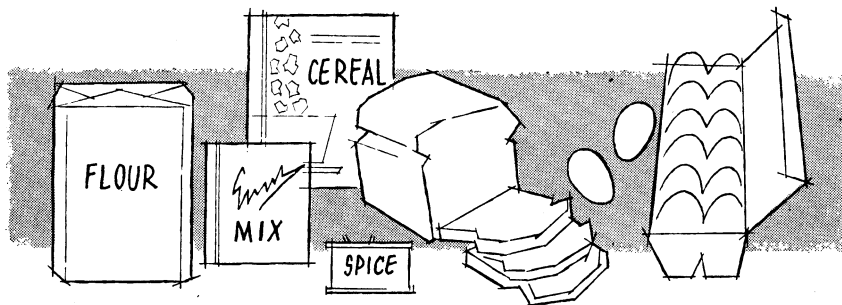
Dry mixes

Cake, pancake, cookie, muffin, and roll mixes may be held at room temperatures.

Eggs

Shell eggs

Store promptly in refrigerator. Eggs retain quality well in the refrigerator; they lose their mild flavor quickly at room temperature. Store in the original carton or a covered container; eggs left uncovered lose moisture through the porous shell.



To insure best quality and flavor, use eggs within a week. If eggs are held too long, the thick white may thin, the yolk membrane may weaken and break when the shell is opened.

Place leftover egg yolks in a dish or cup with just enough cold water to cover. Place leftover whites in a jar or dish and cover tightly. Keep both in refrigerator.

Dried egg

Keep in refrigerator. After a package has been opened, store the unused portion in an airtight container with a tight-fitting lid.

Dried egg will keep its good flavor for about a year if it is stored properly.

Fats and Oils

Most fats and oils need protection from air, heat, and light. Fats and oils in partially filled containers keep longer if they are transferred to smaller containers in which there is little or no air space.

Butter, fat drippings, and margarine

Store, tightly wrapped or covered, in the refrigerator. These products are best used within 2 weeks.

Keep only as much butter or margarine in the butter compartment of the refrigerator as needed for immediate use. Don't let butter or margarine stand for long periods at room temperature; exposure to heat and light hastens rancidity.

Cooking and salad oils

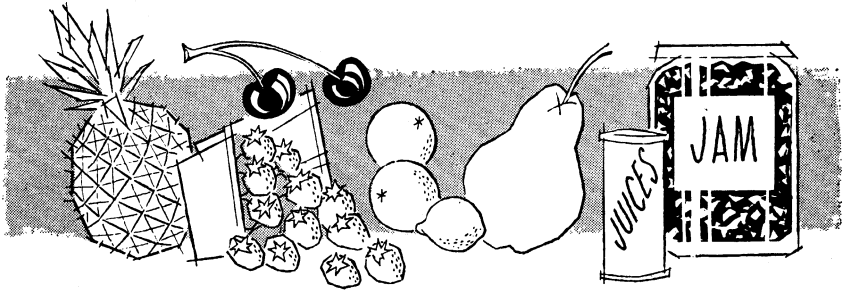
Keep small quantities at room temperature and use before flavor changes. For long storage, keep oils in the refrigerator. Some of these oils may cloud and solidify in the refrigerator. This is not harmful. If warmed to room temperature, they will become clear and liquid.

Hydrogenated shortenings and lard

Most of the firm vegetable shortenings and lard have been stabilized by hydrogenation or antioxidants. These shortenings can be held at room temperature without damage to flavor. Lard that is not stabilized should be refrigerated. Keep these products covered.

Mayonnaise and other salad dressings

Keep all homemade salad dressings in the refrigerator. Purchased mayonnaise and other readymade salad dressings should be refrigerated unless used within a few days.



Fruits

Plan to use fresh fruits promptly while they are sound and of top flavor. Because fruits are fragile they need special handling to keep them from being crushed or bruised. The softened tissues of bruised and crushed fruits permit the entrance of spoilage organisms that quickly break down quality.

Sort fruits before storing. Discard any bruised or decayed fruit to keep it from contaminating sound, firm fruit.

Apples

Store mellow apples uncovered in the refrigerator. Unripe or hard apples are best held at cool room temperature (60° to 70° F.) until ready to eat. Use ripe apples within a week.

Apricots, avocados, grapes, nectarines, pears, peaches, plums, and rhubarb

When these fruits are ripe, store uncovered in the refrigerator. Use within 3 to 5 days.

When unripe, allow to ripen in the open air at room temperature. Do not place in the sun.

Bananas

Store bananas at room temperature.

Berries and cherries

Keep whole and uncovered in the refrigerator until ready to use. Washing and stemming these fruits before refrigerating results in loss of food value and increased spoilage. Use within 1 or 2 days.

Citrus fruits, melons, and pineapples

These fruits are best stored at a cool room temperature (60° to 70° F.). But short-time holding in the refrigerator is not harmful to their quality. If citrus fruits are held too long at too-low temperature, the skin becomes pitted and the flesh discolors. Use these fruits within a week.

Canned fruits, canned fruit juices

After canned fruits and canned fruit juices have been opened, cover, and store in the refrigerator. They can be safely stored in their original containers.

Dried fruits

Keep in tightly closed containers. Store at room temperature, except in warm, humid weather; then refrigerate.

Frozen fruit juices

Cover reconstituted fruit juice concentrates and keep in the refrigerator. For best flavor, keep in glass or plastic containers.

Jellies, jams, and preserves

After these fruit products have been opened, store them, covered, in the refrigerator.

Meat, Poultry, Fish

Cold cuts

Store in the refrigerator. Use within 3 to 5 days.

Cured and smoked meats

Store ham, frankfurters, bacon, bologna, and smoked sausage in the refrigerator in their original packagings. Uncooked cured pork may be stored longer than fresh pork, but the fat will become rancid if held too long.

Bacon should be eaten within a week for best quality, a half ham in 3 to 5 days, a whole ham within a week.

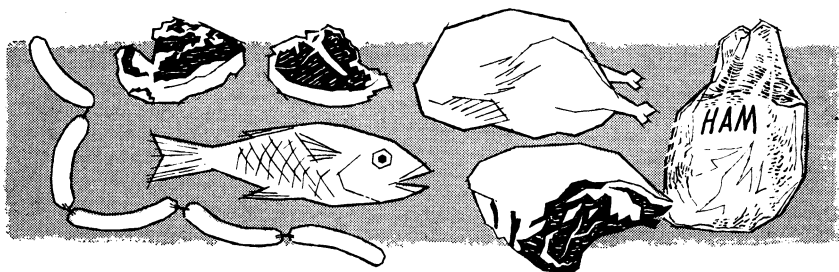
Ham slices should be wrapped tightly. Use within a few days.

Fresh fish, poultry, meat roasts, chops, and steaks

Store all fresh meat, poultry, and fish in the coldest part of the refrigerator, where the temperature is usually between 30° to 35° F.

Loosen wrappings on fresh meat, poultry, and fish since they benefit from some circulation of air in the refrigerator.

For poultry and fish short holding—1 or 2 days—is recommended. Roasts, chops, and steaks may be held 3 to 5 days.



Ground and mechanically tenderized meats

Store, loosely wrapped, in coldest part of the refrigerator. Use within 1 or 2 days.

Ground meats, such as hamburger and fresh bulk sausage, are more likely to spoil than roasts, chops, or steaks because more of the meat surface has been exposed to contamination from air, from handlers, and from mechanical equipment.

Leftover cooked meats and meat dishes

Cool quickly (container may be placed in cold water), cover or wrap loosely, refrigerate promptly. Use within 1 or 2 days.

Leftover stuffing

Remove leftover stuffing from chicken or turkey, cool immediately, and store separately from the rest of the bird. Use within 1 or 2 days.

Leftover gravy and broth

These are highly perishable. Cover, store in the refrigerator promptly. Use within 1 or 2 days.

Variety meats such as liver, kidneys, brains, and poultry giblets

Store, loosely wrapped, in the coldest part of refrigerator. Use within 1 or 2 days.

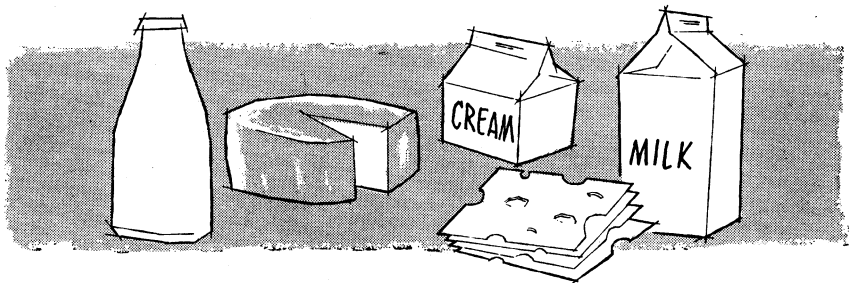
Before storing poultry giblets remove them from the separate bag in which they are often packed, rewrap loosely, and refrigerate.

Milk, Cream, Cheese

Fresh milk and cream

Store in refrigerator at about 40° F. Milk and cream are best stored only 3 to 5 days. Keep covered so they won't absorb odors and flavors of other foods.

Rinse bottle or carton under cold, running water, dry, and refrigerate as soon as possible after delivery or purchase. If milk is delivered to your house, make arrangements to keep it from standing in a warm place or being exposed to sunlight. Exposure to sun impairs both flavor and riboflavin content of milk.



Dry milks

Keep dry milk—either nonfat or whole—in a tightly closed container.

Nonfat dry milk will keep in good condition for several months on the cupboard shelf at temperatures of 75° F. or lower. Close the container immediately after using. Dry milk takes up moisture and becomes lumpy if long exposed to air. Lumps make reconstitution difficult.

Dry whole milk is marketed only on a small scale, chiefly for infant feeding. Because of its fat content, it does not keep as well as nonfat dry milk; after the container has been opened, dry whole milk should be stored, tightly covered, in the refrigerator.

Refrigerate reconstituted dry milk like fresh fluid milk.

Evaporated milk and condensed milk

Store at room temperature until opened, then cover tightly and refrigerate like fresh fluid milk.

Cheese spreads and cheese foods

After containers of these foods have been opened, store, covered, in the refrigerator.

Hard cheeses such as Cheddar, Parmesan, and swiss

Keep in the refrigerator. Wrap tightly to keep out air. The original packaging may be used. Stored this way, hard cheeses will keep indefinitely.

Trim away any mold that forms on the surface of cheese before use.

Soft cheeses such as cottage, cream, Camembert

Store, tightly covered, in the coldest part of the refrigerator. Use cottage cheese within 3 to 5 days, others within 2 weeks.

Vegetables

The fresher vegetables are when eaten, the better. If green vegetables have to be held, limit storage to a few days.

With only a few exceptions vegetables keep best in the refrigerator.

The exceptions—potatoes, sweetpotatoes, dry onions, hard-rind squashes, eggplant, and rutabagas—keep well in cool rather than cold storage.

Sort vegetables before storing them. Discard any that are bruised, soft, or that show evidence of decay or worm injury.

The vegetable crisper in your refrigerator performs better if it is at least two-thirds full. If crisper is less full than this, vegetables will keep better if they are put in plastic bags before going into the crisper.

Asparagus

Discard tough parts of stalks. Store in the refrigerator in crisper or in plastic bag.

Broccoli

Store in refrigerator in crisper or in plastic bag to hold down moisture losses.

Cabbage, cauliflower, and brussels sprouts

Store cabbage, cauliflower, and brussels sprouts in the refrigerator in crisper or in plastic bags.

Carrots, beets, and radishes

Remove root tips and tops. Store covered in refrigerator.

Green peas and limas

Leave in pods and store in refrigerator. Use within a day or two.

Lettuce and other salad greens

Store in crisper in the refrigerator or in plastic bags to hold down loss of moisture.

Onions

Store *dry onions* at room temperature, or slightly cooler. They sprout and decay at high temperature and in high humidity. Place in loosely woven or open-mesh containers with good circulation of air for home storage.

Keep *green onions* cold and moist in the refrigerator. Store in plastic bags.

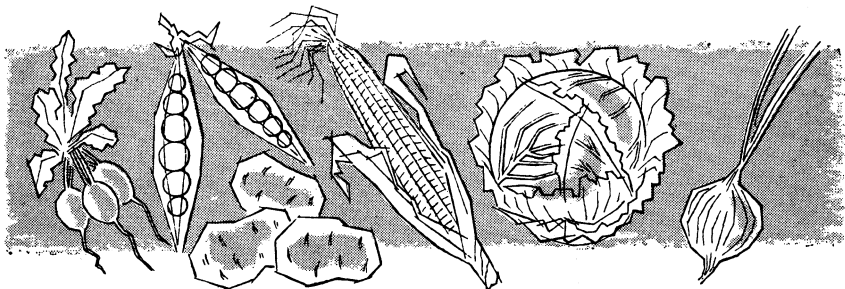
Peppers and cucumbers

Wash and dry. Store in crisper or in plastic bags in the refrigerator.

Potatoes

Store in a dark, dry place with good ventilation and a temperature of 45° to 50° F. Light causes greening, which lowers eating quality. High temperatures hasten sprouting and shriveling.

Storing potatoes at temperatures that are too low may change some of the starch in them to sugar. If potatoes taste too sweet because of too-cold storage, their flavor may be improved by keeping them at room temperature, 70° to 80° F., for a week or two before using them.



**Spinach, kale,
collards, chard,
and beet, turnip
and mustard greens**

Wash thoroughly in cold water. Lift these leafy green vegetables out of the water as grit settles to the bottom of the pan. Drain. Store in refrigerator in crisper or in plastic bags.

Sweet corn

Store, unhusked and uncovered, in the refrigerator.

**Sweetpotatoes,
hard-rind squashes,
eggplant, and
rutabagas**

Store at cool room temperature around 60° F. Temperatures below 50° may cause chilling injury.

Tomatoes

Store ripe tomatoes uncovered in the refrigerator. Keep unripe tomatoes at room temperature away from direct sunlight until they ripen.

Miscellaneous Foods

Honey and sirups

Store at room temperature until opened. After their containers are opened, honey and sirups are better protected from mold in the refrigerator. If crystals form, dissolve them by placing container of honey or sirup in hot water.

Nuts

Store in airtight containers in the refrigerator. Because of their high fat content, nuts require refrigeration to delay development of rancidity.

Unshelled nuts keep better than shelled. Unsalted nuts keep better than salted because salt speeds rancidity.

Peanut butter

After a jar of peanut butter has been opened it should be kept in the refrigerator. Remove it from the refrigerator a short time before using to allow it to soften.



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